

WAR TERMINATION CRITERIA: LINKING STRATEGIC POLICY AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

A Monograph

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ABSTRACT

WAR TERMINATION CRITERIA: LINKING STRATEGIC POLICY AND OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES, by MAJ James H. Scott III, US Army, 45 pages.

The purpose of this study is to explore two historical case studies from the Vietnam War to discover how termination criteria influence the planning process and the relationship between strategic aims and operational objectives. The significance of this study is to yield and codify salient points from an analysis of an historical case study in regards to war termination. Examining the Vietnam War termination from policy to operational objectives tested the hypothesis that war termination criteria should be articulated before the employment of military forces. Through application of the elements of operational art, planners must look beyond the initial campaign and tighten the aperture between strategic aims and operational objectives. This study uses structured, focused comparison method to examine two separate time periods in the Vietnam War, President Johnson's war in Vietnam case study and President Nixon's war in Vietnam case study. An exploration of two historical case studies from the Vietnam War enables this study to analyze the influence of termination criteria on the planning process and the relationship between strategic aims and operational objectives. The overall hypothesis tested is that if the United States clearly identifies the national strategic objectives and termination criteria, then operational planners could develop and adjust an operational approach to link the operational objectives and policy. The evidence suggests that the overall thesis for this monograph has a mixed outcome. Thus, when war termination criteria are clearly defined then operational planners can apply operational art to develop plans to meet strategic objectives, is correct and supported by the analysis of the evidence in one of the case studies.

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INTRODUCTION

The realities of 21st century conflict necessitate the adoption of a new planning paradigm. The idea of war termination reflects a model suited for a bipolar world or a time when “unconditional surrender” constituted a realistic termination plan. As the United States prepares for the next conflict, it must not only carefully consider valid criteria for entering conflicts but also plan how to terminate them. Exit strategy and conflict termination planning must become a part of the military culture and must be included as a requirement in joint planning.

The United States Army historically struggles to formulate successful war termination criteria because current operational planning guidance fails to properly address this critical aspect of conflict. The United States Military doctrine has an existing shortfall and ineffective exit planning strategies to conduct successful war termination. Using key points of the Vietnam War, this monograph will examine war termination criteria in order to formulate proposed improvements to operational planning guidance. Therefore, when war termination criteria are clearly defined, the operational planner can apply operational art to develop a plan to meet strategic objectives.

The purpose of this study is to explore a historical case study from the Vietnam War to discover how termination criteria influence the planning process and the relationship between strategic aims and operational objectives. The significance of this study is to yield and codify salient points from an analysis of an historical case study in regards to war termination and withdrawal from conflict. Examining the Vietnam War termination from policy to operational objectives, one may discover generalizable knowledge to fill the current gap for political and operational planners alike.

A wide range of definitions for conflict termination and war termination are present in a multitude of scholarly work. Throughout the literature, war termination and conflict termination is often used interchangeably of each other. This monograph also uses the terms interchangeably

and defines war termination and conflict termination as a process, an interaction among the belligerents involving tradeoffs, during which each side strives to attain its policy objectives within the limits of acceptable costs.¹ The prevailing theory among contemporary scholars on war termination acknowledges war as a conflict or clash of political, ideological, or economic interests between two or more groups. The process of war termination leads to the resolution of a conflict and the basis for mutual acceptance of interests and objectives to ensure lasting settlement conditions.

War termination criteria should be articulated before the employment of military force. Through the application of the elements of operational art, planners must look beyond the initial campaign and tighten the aperture between strategic aims and tactical objectives. Thus, this study will test five hypotheses. They are:

H1: If the United States strategic policy on communism were clear, then there would be a precise nesting between the overall national strategy and the strategic aims and goal for Vietnam.

H2: If the United States national strategic objectives were clear, then there would be a precise link between operational objectives and policy.

H3: If the Joint Force Commander understands the war termination criteria, then the command will have the ability to adjust the operational approach, linking tactical actions with strategic aims.

H4: If war termination criteria is defined, then there will be a clear link between policy and operational objectives.

H5: If the United States military doctrine reference war termination is clear, then the United States operational planner will have a cogent process to develop operational objectives.

Five research questions guide the collection of data to test the hypotheses. They are:

¹James W. Reed, *Should Deterrence Fail: War Termination and Campaign Planning* (Newport: U.S. Naval War College, 1992), 6.

Q1: What was the United States overall strategy towards communism?

Q2: What were the United States national strategic objectives in Vietnam?

Q3: What was the overall military strategy for Vietnam and what operational approach did the US military take to achieve these strategic objectives?

Q4: What were the war termination criteria?

Q5: What did doctrine state at the time reference war termination?

This monograph includes the following limitations: Only unclassified, previously published, open source data and material were accessible in conducting the research for this monograph. Additionally, limiting this monograph is the available time for research and restricted nature of the monograph length. The scope of this monograph was concentrated on two historical case studies of the Vietnam War. In order to use evidence within the case study for potential applicability to other terminations of war, this study assumes that the selected case study has a degree of potential relevance to be drawn from historical analysis and has present day application. This monograph acknowledges that this assumption will not hold true in all future terminations of war. However, it is reasonable to assume that the evidence identified will have general applicability to future wars and conflicts.

This monograph is presented in seven sections. Following this introduction, section two will cover a literature review of scholarly works on war termination in Vietnam and general war termination theory. Section three is the paper's research methodology, a structured focused methodology is used to examine the historical case study in order to analyze war termination criteria in the Vietnam War. Section's four and five will use historical case studies of the Vietnam War to facilitate the monograph research. Section six will analyze the case study through a cross case analysis of the two case studies. Finally, section seven is a summary of the arguments main points and key conclusions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents the rationale for conducting this study. This literature review explores the lessons drawn by other scholars regarding war termination. Elements of war termination dates back to one of the patriarchs of military theory, Carl von Clausewitz. He stated that “no one starts a war – or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so – without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.”² A good deal of academic study has focused on conflict and war termination. However, there is a shortage of scholarly consensus and theory. Therefore, this literature review will examine the prevailing theories related to war termination, define key terms fundamental to this monograph, and provide an overview of existing United States Joint and Army doctrine to provide context for the discussion of war termination. A thorough review of the literature reveals how the ambiguous nature of ending wars makes it difficult to understand and define war termination.

The literature reviewed on the war termination criteria that the United States initially employed upon entering into the Vietnam War and the evolution of the war termination criteria that was developed after the 1968 Tet offensives are the empirical links this monograph searched to postulate. The notion is that when war termination criteria are clearly defined then the operational planner can apply operational art to develop a plan to meet strategic objectives. Bruce Clarke recognizes the importance of a congruent link between the military planner and the political objectives. Linking to hypothesis four, Clarke states “how inconsistent terminology and lack of clear termination criteria could confuse military planners.”³ Additionally, Clarke addresses the importance of synchronizing the military’s actions with the political objectives

²Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 579.

³Bruce B. G. Clarke, *Conflict Termination: A Rational Model* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1992), 27.

during war.⁴ A link to hypothesis two is seen in Ronald Spector's accomplished work on the Vietnam War, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Years in Vietnam*. He asserts "that most American commanders in Vietnam failed to adapt their operational methods to the changing political and strategic aims."⁵ Michael Handel, a prominent Vietnam War era theorist, postulates "a military planner's confusion stems from a lack of clarity regarding termination, from mismatched semantics and epistemology."⁶ In simpler terms, a lack of clear doctrine references war termination, which links to hypothesis four. The development of war termination criteria is vital for successful war termination. Linking to hypothesis two and four, Bruce Clarke states there are three critical guidelines for successfully conflict termination: "First, political leadership must provide a clear vision of the post-conflict environment. Second, political leaders must clearly outline the strategic objectives needed to obtain the desired environment. Third, from clear understanding of the above mentioned guidelines, military planners should establish the military objectives required to obtain the political goal."⁷ Linking hypothesis five is the evolution of United States Military doctrine and creation of United States Department of Defense Joint Doctrine.

In reviewing prominent war termination theories, bargaining theory is the prevailing theory applying to war termination. Dan Reiter, an associate professor of political science at Emory University, suggests that most situations involving conflict are essentially situations

⁴Ibid., 27.

⁵Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York, NY: First Vintage Books Edition, 1993), xvii.

⁶Michael Handel, "The Study of War Termination," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 1 (1978): 62-63.

⁷Clarke, *Conflict Termination: A Rational Model*, 27-28.

involving some form of bargaining.⁸ He defines bargaining as “the process by which two actors strive to divide a disputed good.”⁹ Belligerents understand that war comes at great financial and human cost. If belligerents knew who would win the war, it is easy to surmise that they might choose not to fight. However, war is unpredictable. It is this uncertainty that drives nations to war.

One of the first theorists to discuss conflict termination was Lewis Coser. In 1961, Coser posited that conflict termination is not as easy as defeating the enemy and setting the conditions needed to meet the United States strategic interests. Instead, he believes contrary to what common sense might suggest that not only the potential victor, but also the potential vanquished make crucial contributions to the termination. Coser points out, “war is pressed by the victor, but peace by the vanquished. Therefore, to determine the causes of peace, it is always necessary to take the vanquished’s point of view.”¹⁰

In his classic work on conflict termination, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process*, Paul Pillar states that military operations do not influence diplomacy directly. Instead, these operations influence an opponent’s perceptions, interpretations, and expectations. Pillar states “the objectives assigned to the military, and the amount of violence used to obtain them, must rely on obtaining a political or diplomatic objective.”¹¹ Therefore, the political leadership must set the limits and the objectives for the military for proper conflict termination in order to prevent military leaders from souring the process by using excessive and

⁸Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 2.

⁹Reiter, *How Wars End*, 8.

¹⁰Lewis A. Coser, “The Termination of Conflict,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 4 (December 1961): 348.

¹¹Paul R. Pillar, *Negotiating Peace: War Termination as a Bargaining Process* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 140-144.

unnecessary violence. The use of such violence often leads to deep-seeded hatred and mistrust, hampering the pursuit of national interests.

Another prominent theorist, Fred Iklé states “while preparing for major military operations, military and political leaders can effectively work together. By contrast, planning to end a war finds little collaboration.”¹² Additionally, military leaders fail to link such costs to how well their campaigns actually meet the nation’s interests. Reflecting upon the United States’ withdrawal from Vietnam, Iklé addresses how military leaders often underestimate the cost of winning a conflict. This, coupled with the lack of an exit strategy, often results in a conflict becoming extremely unpopular.¹³

Finally, Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner thoroughly reviewed the history of war termination theory in an effort to determine why there were so many differing viewpoints. In their 2002 article, they postulated that prior termination theory varied widely because theorists failed to recognize the importance of political negotiations in conjunction with military operations. Filson and Werner believed prior theories addressed the symptoms of a conflict, and not the cause. Political negotiations address the roots of the conflict, therefore negotiations must continue after the onset of war. Additionally, leaders should pursue termination simultaneously along all instruments of national power, not just the military.¹⁴

The four terms key to this monograph are: war termination, strategic objective, operational objective and operational approach. A wide range of definitions for conflict termination and war termination are present in a multitude of scholarly work. Throughout the

¹²Fred C. Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 85.

¹³Iklé, *Every War Must End*, 7.

¹⁴Darren Filson and Suzanne Werner, “A Bargaining Model of War and Peace: Anticipating the Onset, Duration, and Outcome of War,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 4 (October 2002): 820-821.

literature, war termination and conflict termination are often used interchangeably of each other. This monograph uses the terms interchangeably and defines war termination and conflict termination as “a process, an interaction among the belligerents involving tradeoffs, during which each side strives to attain its policy objectives within the limits of acceptable costs.”¹⁵

In defining strategic and operational objectives, the foundation of both terms must be set by first defining objective. An objective is the “clearly defined, decisive, and attainable goal.”¹⁶ Objectives provide focus and are essential for concentrating unifying efforts.¹⁷ Strategic objective, for the purpose of this monograph, is defined as a broadly stated outcome that needs to be achieved to make the overall strategy a success. Operational objective is defined as an intermediate goal, that when attained moves an organization towards achieving strategic aims.¹⁸

The final key term this monograph will define is operational approach. Department of Defense Joint Publication 5-0 (JP 5-0), *Joint Operations Planning* defines operational approach as a “description of the broad actions the force must take to transform current conditions into those desired end states.”¹⁹ With the foundational terms defined, this monograph will review current United States Joint and Army doctrine in order to provide context for the discussion of war termination.

¹⁵Reed, *Should Deterrence Fail: War Termination and Campaign Planning*, 6.

¹⁶Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 11 August 2011), xxi.

¹⁷Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2 May 2007; Change 1, 20 March 2009), I-20.

¹⁸Strategic objective and operational objective definitions are a compilation and conglomeration of multiple United States Army doctrinal, institutional, and academic definition in order to provide a common foundation for this monograph.

¹⁹Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 11 August 2011), III-5.

Doctrine provides the military's framework to plan and execute operations. Commanders and planners use doctrine to develop operations using a commonly shared language. However, doctrine is not an unbreakable constraint, or the unequivocal answer to every operational challenge or foe. It is merely a guideline to help planners and commanders achieve the most favorable mission results. For doctrine to be effective, it must be clear. The concept of war termination in United States doctrine is unclear at best. A review of several Department of Defense (DOD) doctrinal publications presents a better understanding of the lack of clarity relating to war termination in current United States doctrine.

Joint Publication 1 (JP 1), *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* argued that “it is absolutely essential to understand that termination of operations is an essential link between National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, National Military Strategy, and the national strategic end state.”²⁰ However, the mention of, or reference to, war termination is noticeably absent from any of the publications defining United States national security or defense strategy. Further examination of joint doctrine only helps cloud the issue of war termination.

Joint Publication 5-0 (JP 5-0), *Joint Operations Planning* doctrine emphasizes the development of termination criteria that includes the achievement of operational tasks such as the transition to post-conflict operations. Operational planners use termination criteria to develop military objectives required to achieve the military end state. However, doctrine does not provide a solid definition of termination. Joint Publication 3-0 (JP 3-0), *Joint Operations* is more direct in defining the concept of termination. Although JP 3-0 again fell short of an actual definition of termination, it defines termination criteria as “the specified standards approved by the President

²⁰Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*, I-19.

and/or the Secretary of Defense that must be met before a joint operation can be concluded.”²¹ Furthermore, it generally describes termination as the end of joint military operations and redeployment of military personnel.

Considering that doctrine is the basis for all military operations, it is easy to understand that the lack of clarity in doctrine translates to difficulty in understanding the concept of war termination. The characteristics and circumstances surrounding each armed conflict are unique. Therefore, it is understandable that it is difficult for the U.S. military to institutionalize the concept of war termination through the establishment of clear doctrine.

The preceding review of literature related to war termination theory provides a general understanding of the central theoretical background to war termination. However, the most poignant conclusion gleaned from this review is that the quantity of literature related to war termination theory remains insufficient. Although war termination theorists have provided applicable negotiating and bargaining principles to conventional wars between rational state actors, they are less applicable to the nature of today’s hybrid wars. Beyond the background, this section provides common war and conflict termination language by defining the salient terms within this monograph, provided an overview of the predominant theories related to war termination, and reviewed the existing United States Joint and Army doctrine in order to provide context for the historical case study in Sections four and five. Section three is the research methodology used to examine the historical case study in order to analyze war termination criteria in the Vietnam War.

²¹Department of Defense, Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2011), GL-17.

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this study was to test the hypothesis that war termination criteria should be articulated before the employment of military forces. Through application of the elements of operational art, planners must look beyond the initial campaign and tighten the aperture between strategic aims and operational objectives. This section outlines the methodology employed to test this hypothesis, using qualitative analysis. This study uses structured, focused comparison method to examine two separate time periods in the Vietnam War. As described by George and Bennett in *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, the method is structured in that the analysis of the case studies is conducted through a set of guiding questions. Additionally, the method is focused as it analyzes only two defined historical case studies.²² This section is composed of four subsections detailing selection of significant cases, criteria assessment, data collection, and a summary.

The two case studies examined by this monograph are separate time periods during the Vietnam War. The first case study, President Johnson's Vietnam War, will cover 1964-1968. The second case study, President Nixon's Vietnam War, will cover 1969-1974. These case studies were selected due to the overall impact the United States termination and withdrawal had on United States foreign policy and serves as a common framework in which to analyze war termination. Additionally, the Vietnam War represents the largest and most recent termination of combat actions across the full range of military operations. Excluding, the recent termination and withdrawal of United States forces from Operation New Dawn in Iraq.

This subsection outlines questions this monograph seeks to answer, why each questions is relevant to this study, and what answer is expected to be found in the two case studies selected. Question one is, what was the United States overall strategy towards communism? The answer to

²²Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), 67-72.

this question provides the strategic policy of the United States on communism and provides a link between the overall national strategy and the strategic aims and goal for Vietnam. This monograph expects that if the United States overall national strategic policy towards communism was clear, then there would be a precise link between the national policy on communism and strategic aims for Vietnam. Question two is, what was the United States national strategic objectives in Vietnam? This monograph expects that if the United States national strategic objectives were clear, then there would be a precise link between operational objectives and policy. Question three is, what was the overall military strategy for Vietnam and what operational approach did the US military take to achieve these strategic objectives? This question relates directly to the understanding, visualization, and direction the United States military took to achieve its overall end state. Expected finding include, if the Joint Force Commander understands the war termination criteria, then the command will have the ability to adjust its operational approach, linking tactical actions with strategic aims. Question four is, what are the war termination criteria? The relevance of question four relates to the published war termination criteria for the United States involvement in the Vietnam War. This monograph expects to find, if war termination criteria is defined, then there will be a clear link between policy and operational objectives. The final question addressed in this monograph is, what did doctrine state at the time reference to war termination? This question provides the common framework in which operational planners were operating within. This monograph expects this research to yield, if the United States military doctrine's reference to war termination is codified, then the United States operational planner will have a cogent process to develop operational objectives and then there should be direct linkage between operational objective and policy.

Historical texts, doctrine and professional military journals provide the data for analysis of this study. Historical texts will inform the environmental conditions, planning, and execution of the campaigns, as well as assessing their success. Multiple texts and summaries, for each

campaign, provide historical accuracy. Doctrine and military journals provide an account of the organizational understanding and doctrinal development of the period. The personal statements and opinions of strategic leaders of the period, as published in biographies and historical texts, provide insights to the effectiveness of the campaigns.

This section outlined the structured, focused methodology approach by introducing standardized questions that will be evaluated using the historical case studies selected. In addition, outlining the focused approach concentrating on how doctrine influenced the war termination planning process. Additionally, this section presented the significance of the case studies selected, the criteria for assessment, and the approach of data collection all nested with the study's overarching purpose.

CASE STUDIES

The Vietnam War presents an excellent case study in which to explore the arguments of this monograph. This section provides an overview of the Vietnam War from 1963 to 1975. Identifying a start point and end point for each case study establishes President Johnson's war in Vietnam case study and President Nixon's war in Vietnam case study. Next, using the five research questions posited in section one this monograph will answer and assess each question by providing detailed explanations and historical context. Finally, this section concludes with a summary of President Johnson's Vietnam War case study.

President Johnson's War in Vietnam Case Inquiry

In late 1963, assassination of the South Vietnamese President, weakening of the Vietnamese central government, growing corruption within the South Vietnamese Army, and uncontested insurgent control of key areas in South Vietnam all contributed to limited success for a purely South Vietnamese approach to defeating the North Vietnamese insurgency. The recently elected U.S. President, Lyndon Johnson, saw little choice but to escalate America's involvement

in Vietnam to what amounted to “a decision for full-scale war.”²³ This approach to the war required a new operational approach, and a larger commitment of U.S. military forces.

Beginning in 1965, General William Westmoreland, commander of the United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), began to receive an increasing number of American combat troops. Employing these troops in his “pacification” program, Westmoreland instituted two operational approaches focused on clearing insurgent forces from urban areas and destroying the exposed enemy with a series of conventional military operations.²⁴ To achieve these goals, Westmoreland’s attrition strategy employed large tactical formations and three primary operational concepts; search and destroy attacks, clear and hold operations, and securing operations.²⁵ The focus for these operations were large-scale, division attacks employing mobility and firepower to destroy enemy formations while preventing friendly casualties.

By 1968, U.S. combat forces committed to Vietnam reached 543,000, yet MACV was unable to show appreciable effects against the North Vietnamese or the Viet Cong, who continued to operate with impunity across South Vietnam in small, decentralized units.²⁶ Three years of limited results eroded United States popular support for the war and fostered an environment of further doubt and pessimism among U.S. leadership. United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara argues “the war cannot be won by killing North Vietnamese, it can

²³Robert A. Doughty, *Warfare in the Western World*, 2 vols. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1996), 912.

²⁴George L. MacGarrigle, “Combat Operations: Taking the Offensive, October 1966 to October 1967,” *United States Army in Vietnam* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1998): 11-12.

²⁵A. J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 368-69.

²⁶Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 197.

only be won by protecting the South Vietnamese.”²⁷ U.S. counterinsurgent methods, however, continued to focus on destroying the enemy through a direct, more conventional, approach.

Further degrading American confidence, in 1968 the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong initiated the Tet Offensive, a countrywide campaign targeting 36 provincial capitals, 5 major cities, 64 district capitals, and 50 hamlets.²⁸ Coming shortly after a report from Westmoreland outlining significant progress in Vietnam, the offensive struck directly at the American public’s will to sustain a long war in Southeast Asia. Although the results were catastrophic to the Viet Cong, the Tet Offensive proved that the war in Vietnam was far from finished.²⁹ The effects of the Tet Offensive, combined with increased anti-war sentiment at home, initiated a significant change in policy by President Lyndon Johnson, who rejected further military escalation and pursued options for peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese.³⁰

Even though North Vietnamese leaders initially responded to President Johnson’s offer for peace negotiations, the North Vietnamese remained completely committed to victory in the south and were prepared to continue fighting. To rebuild losses sustained during the Tet Offensive, the North Vietnamese assumed a strategic defense and implemented a campaign of guerilla warfare in South Vietnam. Critical to the North Vietnamese military success was the rebuilding of the political apparatus and insurgent infrastructure in the south that would prolong the war, target the anti-war demonstrations in the United States, and facilitate American concessions at the negotiating table.³¹ To achieve this, suitable lines of communication became a

²⁷Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt Inc, 1999), 9.

²⁸Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 239.

²⁹Doughty, *Warfare in the Western World*, 2 vols, 922-23.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 925-26.

³¹*Ibid.*, 927.

critical requirement in the North Vietnamese plan for victory and the Ho Chi Minh Trail became the means to this end.

After President Nixon's election in 1969, Vietnamization became the policy of the United States. The goal of Vietnamization was to expand, equip, train South Vietnam's forces, and assign to them an ever-increasing combat role. While at the same time steadily reducing the number of American combat troops. The United States placed General Creighton Abrams in command of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. General Abrams was committed to make the policy of Vietnamization work. Additionally, President Nixon, not wanting to be the first American president to lose a war, attempted to ensure that a U.S. withdrawal would not cause the anticommunist government in Saigon to fall.³² Instead of an immediate withdrawal, President Nixon attempted a strategy of withdrawing while preserving America's honor. As the United States withdrew military forces and changed its focus to the new strategy, the United States focused on financial aid and a military advisory mission. By 1971, the majority of the Viet Cong and the National Liberation Front were destroyed and the South Vietnamese government in Saigon had control over most of its population.³³

In 1973, the multi-party Paris Peace Accords were conducted to secure a peace with honor. The North Vietnamese agreed to a bilateral cease-fire and to release prisoners while the United States agreed to the cease-fire and not to interfere with the domestic policy of South Vietnam. Additionally, South Vietnam agreed to these accords, reinforcing its right to self-determination. However, these promises proved short lived. The North Vietnamese quickly broke their pledge with new offensives, knowing that United States domestic support was rapidly

³²Frances FitzGerald, "Vietnam," *Dissent Magazine*, (Winter 2009): 53, <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/author/francesfitzgerald>, (accessed 21 October, 2013).

³³*Ibid.*, 54.

waning for the war. It became obvious that the commitment of American troops to Vietnam would not last.³⁴ By the end of 1974, North Vietnamese forces were once again on the offensive and the United States did not have the national will to fight or aid the South Vietnamese with enough resources to turn the tide. On 23 April 1975, President Ford declared an end to the Vietnam War for the United States.³⁵ The South Vietnamese Army and Saigon fell to the North Vietnamese on 30 April 1975.

The first question used to assess this case is, what was the United States overall strategy towards communism. The general strategy was one of containment of communism. Containment was not new in 1964 and 1965. It originated in the years following World War II.³⁶ Because of this belief, the United States had to deal with the Soviet Union firmly and resist their attempts to spread communist influence globally and produced the cold war paradigm.³⁷ Furthermore, John Gaddis wrote in *Strategies of Containment* that, "Finally, and most dramatically, the new strategy manifested itself in the Truman Doctrine, in what appeared to be a worldwide commitment to resist Soviet expansionism wherever it appeared."³⁸ Additionally, the "loss" of mainland China to communism in 1949, and the Korean War that followed, caused the United States to view the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China as a monolithic communist bloc bent on world domination.³⁹ In January 1950, President Truman directed both the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense to "undertake a reexamination of our objectives in peace and war and of the

³⁴Jeffrey Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988), 490-492.

³⁵Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 545.

³⁶John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19.

³⁷Frederick H. Hartmann and Robert L. Wendzel, *America's Foreign Policy in a Changing World* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1994), 206.

³⁸Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 22.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 68.

effect of these objectives on our strategic plans, in the light of the probable fission bomb capability and possible thermonuclear bomb capability of the Soviet Union.”⁴⁰

In response, on April 14, 1950, the United States National Security Council issued a fifty-eight-page top secret policy paper titled The National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) “United States Objectives and Programs for National Security.”⁴¹ NSC-68 largely shaped U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War for the next 20 years, and involved a decision to make containment against global communist expansion a high priority.⁴² The strategy outlined in NSC-68 arguably achieved ultimate victory with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of a “new world order” centered on American liberal-capitalist values alone.⁴³ The evidence suggests that the strength and direction of NSC-68 remained the overall strategy for the United States and shaped the strategic aims and goals in Vietnam.

The second question used to assess this case is, what were the United States national strategic objectives in Vietnam? The overarching strategy in Vietnam for the United States was to “bring peace to South East Asia and halt communist expansion,” as articulated by the United States Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara.⁴⁴ President Lyndon Johnson’s strategic objectives became clear after the 1964 presidential elections. President Johnson endorsed measures of gradually increasing military intensity in order to bolster morale in Saigon, attack the National Liberation Front, and the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Additionally, President Johnson wanted to

⁴⁰Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, “NSC-68, 1950,” 1964-1968, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/NSC68>, (accessed on 10 January 2014).

⁴¹Ibid.,.

⁴²Walter L. Hixson, “What Was the Cold War and How Did We Win It?” *Reviews in American History* (1994): 507.

⁴³Ibid., 509.

⁴⁴Robert S. McNamara, *United States Policy in Vietnam*, 26 March 1964, Department of State Bulletin, 562.

pressure Hanoi into ending its aid of the communist insurgency.⁴⁵ Shaped by NSC-68 and the containment of communism, the United States had four salient strategic objectives guiding the overall aims and goals in Vietnam from 1965-1968. The first three objectives applied not only to U.S. policy toward Vietnam, but also to global U.S. policy. The fourth strategic objective was only applicable to policy goals towards Vietnam. The following list is a general summary of the major U.S. objectives synthesized from several sources.⁴⁶ First, contain the spread of communism to its current geographic boundaries by preventing non-communist countries from falling to communism by either internal or external threats, including South Vietnam. Second, build and maintain confidence in the ability and willingness of the United States to protect her allies in the Asian-Pacific region, and worldwide. Third, avoid general war with the Soviet Union and/or Communist China. Fourth, advance South Vietnam as a politically and economically stable autonomous nation state, capable of defending herself from external military threats. These four strategic objectives guided U.S. policy in regard to Vietnam. Each instrument of national power had a role to play in achieving the U.S. strategic objectives in Vietnam. The military instrument of power had a role in all four strategic objectives, never an autonomous role.

President Johnson held the strategy of flexible response to achieve the national policy objective of containment.⁴⁷ Flexible response was a shift toward a national military strategy that allowed for handling national crises with a diverse set of tools. These tools included political,

⁴⁵Department of State, "Position Paper on Southeast Asia" 02 December 1964, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), *1964-1968: Vietnam 1964*, 1: 969-974, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v01/d232>, (accessed 9 January 2014).

⁴⁶These four strategic objectives are synthesized from several different primary sources. The first source is President Johnson's address at Johns Hopkins University on 7 April 1965, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v02/d245>, (accessed 10 January 2014). Additional sources include defense department memorandums from the Secretary of Defense in March 1964, and the assistant Secretary of Defense in November 1964. These two documents are contained in an extract of The Pentagon Papers, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v02/d154>, (accessed 9 January 2014).

⁴⁷Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, 230.

economic, diplomatic, and military actions.⁴⁸ Militarily, this strategy was a significant departure from Eisenhower's Massive Retaliation Strategy because it recognized the need for graduated and flexible military responses to situations short of all-out nuclear war. Flexible response provided a means of obtaining national policy objectives gradually so as not to rely solely on immediate and dangerous escalation. Understanding the context that shaped the decisions made by the Johnson Administration towards Vietnam sheds light on the intentions of gradual increasing flexible response. The answer to this question provided the overall strategic aims of the United States and allowed operational planners to extrapolate intermediate operational objectives to meet the military end state. The evidence suggests that the United States national strategic objectives were clear, providing the United States military a foundation for which to construct an operational approach.

The third question used to assess this case is, what was the overall military strategy for Vietnam and what operational approach did the United States military take to achieve the strategic objectives? The overall military strategy for Vietnam established key military goals and objectives for the military to achieve. The United States military strategy was clearly laid out in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum-652-65 dated August 27, 1965. However, the military strategy was not linked or nested with the four salient national strategic objectives in Vietnam. The military specific goals and objectives did not provide planners the information necessary to aid in the development of a linked and nested operational approach. The Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum-652-65 dated August 27, 1965 established three key tasks for military operations in Vietnam. First, to cause North Vietnam to cease its direction and support of the Viet Cong insurgency. Second, to defeat the Viet Cong and extend the South Vietnamese government's control over South Vietnam. Third, to deter communist China from direct intervention and to

⁴⁸Ibid., 232.

defeat such intervention if it occurs.⁴⁹ In March 1965, General William Westmoreland, commander of the United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV), submitted his Commander's Estimate of the Situation in South Vietnam to both the Commander of Pacific Command and to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Westmoreland asserted that the American objectives in South Vietnam were to "cause the Democratic Republic of Vietnam to cease its political and military support of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam and enable an anti-Communist government of Vietnam to survive so that ultimately it may defeat the Viet Cong insurgency inside South Vietnam."⁵⁰ General Westmoreland developed his assessment of the war's future evolution into a three-phase operation. Phase one would employ the initial reinforcements to prevent the loss of South Vietnam and halt the losing trend by the end of 1965. Phase two would employ additional U.S. and allied forces during the first half of 1966 to destroy enemy forces operating in high priority areas of South Vietnam. Phase three would require all allied forces to work in tandem to deny the enemy use of base areas within South Vietnam and to destroy all enemy forces capable of massing within the country. In mid-1965, Westmoreland expected phase three to be completed by the end of 1967, at which point American and allied forces could begin to withdrawal, as South Vietnam became able to maintain order and defend its borders.⁵¹

To execute operations, General Westmoreland instituted two approaches focusing on clearing insurgent forces from urban areas and destroying the exposed enemy with a series of

⁴⁹Department of State, "Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara" 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam* 1964, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 9 January 2014).

⁵⁰William Westmoreland, *Commander's Estimate of the Military Situation in South Vietnam*, 26 March 1965, Westmoreland Historical File 14, Center of Military History.

⁵¹Stephen Young. "President Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam War Disengagement Strategy" *Vietnam Magazine* (February 1998), <https://www.historynet.com/lyndon-b-johnson>, (accessed 11 January 2014).

conventional military operations.⁵² To achieve these goals, Westmoreland's attrition strategy employed large tactical formations and three primary operational concepts; search and destroy attacks, clear and hold operations, and securing operations.⁵³ The focus for these operations were large-scale, division attacks employing mobility and firepower to destroy enemy formations while preventing friendly casualties. The evidence suggests that General Westmoreland's understanding of the strategic environment and operational approach was not nested or linked with the overall strategic goals or aims for the war in Vietnam.

The fourth question used to assess this case is, what were the war termination criteria? General Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, identified the basis for terminating the war in Vietnam in the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum-652-65, dated August 27, 1965. Within the memorandum, General Wheeler recognizes the need to plan for war termination and specifically states that "the overall strategic concept for Vietnam, as set forth, provides the basis for terminating the war in Vietnam under conditions which are satisfactory to the United States and the government of South Vietnam."⁵⁴ Though General Wheeler and the Johnson Administration identified the need for termination criteria, clear conditions were not established. The evidence suggests that President Johnson defined strategic war objectives, but did not describe the war termination criteria that needed to be met to end the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. Additionally, the evidence suggests that the operational objectives and approach described by General Westmoreland did not provide a clear link between tactical actions and strategic policy.

⁵²MacGarrigle, *United States Army in Vietnam*, 11-12.

⁵³Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine, 1942-1976*, 368-69.

⁵⁴Department of State, "Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara" 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam 1964*, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 09 January 2014).

The final question used to assess this case is, what did doctrine state at the time reference to war termination? United States Military doctrine did not address war termination before the Vietnam War. The capstone Army doctrine publication, Field Manual 100-5, Field Service Regulations, *Operations*, dated 19 February 1962, did not address war termination. At that time, the United States' termination policy for war was unconditional surrender. Field Manual 100-5 stated that "The ultimate military object of war is the destruction of the enemy's armed forces and his will to fight."⁵⁵ Chapter 2 of Field Manual 100-15, Field Service Regulations, *Larger Units*, dated 12 December 1963, discussed campaign planning and highlights seeking "decisive battle."⁵⁶ However, it did not list war termination as an element of the campaign plan. No official joint doctrine existed before the Vietnam War. However, a lack of codified doctrine does not indicate that war termination criteria was not understood or present at the time. Additionally, the importance of a process establishing conditions in which war can be terminated supporting the development of military operational end state and objectives are evident within official document in 1965.⁵⁷ Yet, the termination criteria was not clear, leaving no concise linkage between operational objectives and strategic policy.

In summary, this section provided an overview of the Vietnam War, the major actions and key events that took place, and an inquiry into President Johnson's war in Vietnam case study using 1964 as the start point and 1968 as the end point framing this case study. By answering the five research questions posited in this monograph and assessing each question by providing detailed explanations and historical context. This section establishes findings that will enable the

⁵⁵United States Army, Field Service Regulations, Field Manual 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 19 February 1962), 46.

⁵⁶United States Army, Field Service Regulations, Field Manual 100-15, *Large Units* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 12 December 1963), 9.

⁵⁷Department of State, "Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara" 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam 1964*, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 09 January 2014).

hypotheses asserted in this monograph to be analyzed in section seven. The next section introduces the remaining case study and will answer the pre-established research questions.

President Nixon's War in Vietnam Case Inquiry

This section will establish President Nixon's war in Vietnam case study timeframe by identifying the start point and end point for the case study and provide an overview of the major actions and key events that took place within the 1969-1973 time period. Next, using the five research questions posited in section one, this monograph will answer and assess each question by providing detailed explanations and historical context. Finally, this section concludes with a summary of President Nixon's Vietnam War case study.

The American military was working with South Vietnamese to improve the effectiveness of their forces through training and by providing weapons and equipment. Just as prospects were looking better, the North Vietnamese swept south for an all-out attack on 17 January 1968, called the Tet Offensive. The North paid a high price for their endeavor; sustaining heavier losses in one month than the United States sustained in five years.⁵⁸ South Vietnam turned the enemy back, their government survived, and there was no popular uprising. The American and South Vietnamese response to the Tet Offensive was a military success. Nevertheless, the Tet Offensive was a political success for the North Vietnamese.

North Vietnam gained a "psychological victory" over the United States. The American public had become war-weary and distrustful of its military leadership. Two months later President Johnson announced his intention to not seek reelection. He attempted one new peace initiative before stepping down from office. He offered to halt the bombing of North Vietnam in hopes that Hanoi would match the restraint and begin formal negotiations. In response, the North Vietnamese agreed to meet at the ambassadorial level. However, their principle goal was to end

⁵⁸Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, 490-492.

the bombing of North Vietnam without curtailing their fighting in the South. In a calculated move, North Vietnam proposed unacceptable negotiation sites, hoping to give the American public the impression that the United States' leadership was not cooperating. Negotiations finally started in Paris. During the talks, Hanoi sent thousands of men to attack South Vietnam. Critics of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War saw any military response to North Vietnamese attacks as an escalatory act. The negotiations were costing American lives and gaining nothing.

Newly elected President Richard M. Nixon declared in 1969 that he would continue the American involvement in the Vietnam War in order to end the conflict and secure "peace with honor" for the United States and for its ally, South Vietnam.⁵⁹ With General Creighton Abrams in command of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Vietnamization became the policy. The goal of Vietnamization was to expand, equip and train South Vietnam's forces and assign to them an ever-increasing combat role. While at the same time steadily reducing the number of American combat troops.⁶⁰ Additionally, President Nixon attempted to ensure that a U.S. withdrawal would not cause the anticommunist government in Saigon to fall.⁶¹ Not wanting to be the first American president to lose a war, President Nixon attempted a strategy of withdrawing while preserving America's honor. President Nixon focused the United States and the MACV on financial aid and a military advisory mission in support of the South Vietnamese.⁶²

⁵⁹Richard Nixon, "03 November 1969 speech" *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon*, (1969), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2303&st=&st1>, (accessed 11 January 2014).

⁶⁰Ibid.,

⁶¹FitzGerald, *Dissent Magazine*, 53.

⁶²Richard M. Nixon, *No More Vietnams* (New York, Arbor House, 1985), 133.

North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces had been using Cambodia and its neutrality for over five years to capture and kill American and South Vietnamese troops. The United States respected the neutrality of Cambodia but paid a heavy price for doing so. On 20 April 1970, President Nixon addressed the nation on the situation in Vietnam and announced the withdrawal of 150,000 American troops.⁶³ On 30 April 1970, President Nixon announced the United States would conduct offensive operations in Cambodia to eliminate communist sanctuaries, show the success of Vietnamization, create time for the success of the withdrawal program, and uphold U.S. ideals and credibility.⁶⁴ The operation was a success. Cambodia could no longer be used as a safe haven for the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong. Allied forces pushed the enemy out of their strongholds along the border with relative ease, capturing an incredible amount of supplies and materiel. Disrupting a planned North Vietnamese Army offensive, the United States military acquired additional time needed for Vietnamization, enabling the continuation of the withdrawal of U.S. forces.⁶⁵ With the success of Vietnamization and in responding to domestic critics, the President continued to order American troops home, leaving only 139,000 by December 1971.⁶⁶

In 1972, President Nixon traveled to China and the Soviet Union in diplomatic initiatives, trying to isolate Hanoi from its suppliers. The North Vietnamese recognized the geo-political easing of tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union because of President Nixon's initiatives.⁶⁷ With the American forces drawdown nearing 100,000 the North Vietnamese

⁶³Richard Nixon, "20 April 1970 speech," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon*, (1970), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2476&st=&st1>, (accessed 11 January 2014).

⁶⁴*Ibid.*,

⁶⁵Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 124.

⁶⁶Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, 282.

⁶⁷Gideon Rose, *How Wars End* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2010), 173.

launched a spring offensive against South Vietnam, in an attempt to push the United States back to the negotiation table and damper relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. In response, the United States conducted a bombing campaign against North Vietnam. Dubbed *Operation Linebacker*, the bombing campaign lasted from May 1972 to October 1972 and targeted Hanoi for the first time.⁶⁸ The effective use of precision guided munitions and overwhelming air power persuaded the North Vietnamese to return to the negotiation table.

In October 1972, the United States and North Vietnamese governments agreed to a ceasefire, return of American prisoners of war, the temporary continuation of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu's government, and permission for NVA troops to remain in South Vietnam. In December 1972, the United States conducted *Operation Linebacker II*, a large bombing campaign of North Vietnam. On 27 January 1973, the United States, North Vietnam, and South Vietnam signed the Paris Peace Agreements Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam.⁶⁹ By the end of 1974, North Vietnamese forces were once again on the offensive and the United States did not have the national will to either redeploy its forces or aid the South Vietnamese with enough resources to turn the tide. On 23 April 1975, President Ford declared an end to the Vietnam War for the United States.⁷⁰

The first question used to assess this case is, what was the United States overall strategy towards communism? The general strategy was one of containment of communism. While still grounded in the United States National Security Councils 58-page top secret policy paper the National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) “United States Objectives and Programs for

⁶⁸Rose, *How Wars End*, 173.

⁶⁹Clarke, *Advice and Support: The Final Years, 1965-1973*, 490-492.

⁷⁰Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 545.

National Security,”⁷¹ U.S. foreign policy was beginning to shift, containment against global communist expansion remained a high priority but the methods began to vary slightly with the new administration.⁷² In July 1969 President Nixon put forth in a press conference the Nixon Doctrine. He stated that the United States henceforth expected its allies to take care of their own military defense, but that the U.S. would aid in defense as requested. The Doctrine argued for the pursuit of peace through a partnership with American allies.⁷³ In the press conference, President Nixon stated that:

“First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitments. Second, we shall provide a shield if a nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with us or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security. Third, in cases involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense.”⁷⁴

The Nixon Doctrine began to reshape the United States policy towards communism. The Nixon administration expanded arms negotiations with the Soviet Union, established formal diplomatic relationships with communist China, and developed Vietnamization as the new strategy in Vietnam. The evidence suggests the strength and direction of NSC-68 and the Nixon Doctrine formed the overall strategy towards communism for the United States, shaping the strategic aims and goals in Vietnam.

⁷¹Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, “NSC-68,1950,” *1964-1968*, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/NSC68>, (accessed on 10 January 2014).

⁷²Walter L. Hixson, “What Was the Cold War and How Did We Win It?” *Reviews in American History* (1994): 507.

⁷³Richard Nixon, “25 July 1969 speech,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon* (1969), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2140>, (accessed 11 January 2014).

⁷⁴*Ibid.*,

The second question used to assess this case is, what were the United States national strategic objectives in Vietnam? President Richard Nixon's strategic objectives became clear after taking office in January 1969. The President's five-point plan included Vietnamization, pacification, diplomatic isolation, peace negotiations, and gradual withdrawal.⁷⁵ The goal of Vietnamization was to expand, equip and train South Vietnam's forces and assign them to an ever-increasing combat role. The salient aim of pacification was to protect and build up the South Vietnamese in the hamlets during North Vietnam's political vacuum following the Tet Offensive. Nixon used diplomatic isolation to enlist the help of the Soviet Union and China by establishing new diplomatic ties in Vietnam. The goal of the peace negotiations included a bottom line to get all United States prisoners of war back and protect South Vietnam's right to determine their own future. Finally, the strategic objective of gradual withdrawal would provide the tangible evidence to the American population that the United States involvement in the Vietnam War was drawing to a close.⁷⁶ The answer to this question provided the overall strategic aims of the United States and allowed operational planners to extrapolate intermediate operational objectives to meet the military end state. The evidence suggests that the United States national strategic objectives were clear, providing the United States Military a foundation for which to construct an operational approach.

The third question used to assess this case is, what was the overall military strategy for Vietnam and what operational approach did the United States military take to achieve the strategic objectives? The United States military developed key military objectives and a supporting operational approach. The United States Military strategy for South Vietnam was

⁷⁵Richard Nixon, "03 November 1969 speech" *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard Nixon* (1969), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2303&st=&st1>, (accessed 11 Jan 2014).

⁷⁶Nixon, *No More Vietnams*, 58-60.

focused on assisting the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) to defeat communist subversion and aggression. The senior military commanders developed three salient aims supporting this strategy. The primary emphasis was on maintaining simultaneous pressure against enemy war making capabilities and disruption activities. The first objectives was to destroy Viet Cong main forces and North Vietnam Army (NVA) forces in South Vietnam, or, force the NVA to withdraw and separate the Viet Cong main force units from the population. Second, the US Military wanted to establish a militarily secure climate within which GVN control could be extended, consolidated, and sustained. The final aim was to improve the national development effort through integrated security, political, economic, social and psychological programs.⁷⁷

Evidence suggests that General Abrams was clearly able to understand, visualize, and direct tactical actions through an operational approach to achieve the overall strategic aims. Within the guidance and direction provided by President Nixon, General Abrams developed the operational approach to the conduct of the Vietnam War, this approach was the “One War strategy.”⁷⁸ General Abrams’ One War concept emphasized the fact that conventional military operations and population centric efforts were not mutually exclusive. Specifically, One War strategy encompassed the use of conventional operations focused on the interdiction of enemy logistics lines of communication in the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam and counterinsurgency efforts in the form of pacification.⁷⁹ Pacification entailed the improvement of South Vietnamese local forces and the denial of the Viet Cong influence in villages and hamlets. The pacification aspect of the One War strategy was, by Abrams’ account, the most important.

⁷⁷Creighton Abrams, *Commanders Summary of the MACV Objective Plan* (Headquarter, MACV Saigon 1969), 22, <http://www.virtual.vietnam.ttu.edu>, (accessed 11 January 2014).

⁷⁸Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, 18.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 238.

Conventional warfare nested within and supported the effort to legitimize the government of South Vietnam and secure the population.⁸⁰

General Abrams believed that the Regional Forces and People's Forces was the centerpiece of pacification in Vietnam. These territorial forces would remain at their homes, secure the population, and rout Viet Cong disruption efforts. General Abrams paid particular attention to the improvement of Regional Forces and People's Forces by sending competent advisory teams to work with them. General Abrams' One War strategy set the tone and provided the direction necessary for the war efforts in Vietnam. With a clearly articulated strategic end state, the military commander was able to understand, visualize, and direct operational objectives that could achieve the overall goal. The evidence suggests that General Abrams' understood the strategic end state, the political and domestic situation, and was able to develop an operational approach to link tactical action to the strategic aims established by President Nixon.

The fourth question used to assess this case study is, what are the war termination criteria? On 3 November 1969, President Nixon's address to the United States laid out to the American people why immediate withdrawal was not in America's or South Vietnam's best interest. Instead, the President discussed a change to American policy addressing negotiations and the war.⁸¹ During the national address President Nixon stated that:

“In order to end a war fought on many fronts, I initiated a pursuit for peace on many fronts. In a television speech on May 14, in a speech before the United Nations, and on a number of other occasions I set forth our peace proposals in great detail.
–We have offered the complete withdrawal of all outside forces within one year.
–We have proposed a cease-fire under international supervision.

⁸⁰Ibid., 23.

⁸¹Richard Nixon, “Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam: The Silent Majority Speech,” November 3, 1969, <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/forresearchers/find/subjects/silent-majority.php>, (accessed 9 November 2013).

–We have offered free elections under international supervision with the Communists participating in the organization and conduct of the elections as an organized political force. And the Saigon Government has pledged to accept the result of the elections.”⁸²

The evidence suggests that President Nixon defined the strategic war objectives and established war termination criteria for the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.

The final question used to assess this case is, what did doctrine state at the time reference to war termination? United States Military doctrine did not address war termination before the Vietnam War. The capstone Military doctrine publications were unchanged and did not address war termination.⁸³ However, in March 1966, the Army Staff produced a report titled *A Program for the Pacification and Long-term Development of South Vietnam*, referred to as PROVN for short. The study criticized the United States government for failing to create a unified and well-coordinated program for eliminating the insurgency in South Vietnam.⁸⁴ To achieve victory, PROVN recommended two major innovations in Army doctrine. The first was a shift in the operational center of gravity away from the destruction of enemy forces toward the protection of civilian populations. The second was an emphasis on small unit operations and restraint in the use of firepower. Each of these innovations represented a stark departure from existent doctrine; however, both are vital to achieving strategic success.⁸⁵ With these major innovations, PROVN essentially sought to shift the American effort from a doctrine based upon attrition warfare to one

⁸²Ibid.,

⁸³There was no change in the codified doctrine during the timeframe covered in the case study. Field Manual 100-5 Change 1, Field Service Regulations, Operations, dated 7 February 1964 and Field Manual 100-15, Field Service Regulations, Larger Units, dated 12 December 1963 discussed campaign planning but not war termination.

⁸⁴Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, “A Program for the Pacification and Long-Term Development of South Vietnam” 1964-1968, 492, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v04/d216>, (accessed on 10 January 2014).

⁸⁵Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 192.

based on counterinsurgency.⁸⁶ Although not codified in doctrine, the evidence suggests that the PROVN report provided the United States military a common understanding of both war termination and a cogent process to develop operational objectives in order to achieve strategic aims.

In summary, this section provides an overview of the Vietnam War, the major actions and key events that took place, and an inquiry into President Nixon's war in Vietnam case study. This case was framed using 1969 as the start point and 1973 as the end point. Answering the five research questions in this case study, assessing each question within historical context, and capturing detailed explanations provides the finding of the case study. This section establishes findings that enable the hypotheses asserted in this monograph to be analyzed in the next section.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this section is to conduct an analysis of the two cases examined in Sections four and five. First, this section reviews the five research questions addressed in the case studies (see table 1 for summary of the findings). Second, to determine whether the findings support the proposed hypothesis (see table 2 for summary of the hypothesis). Finally, this section provides tentative conclusions based on the analysis and findings of the case studies.

What was the United States overall strategy towards communism? Containment was the overall strategy towards communism. In 1950, the United States National Security Council issued a fifty-eight-page top secret policy paper the National Security Council Report 68 (NSC-68) "United States Objectives and Programs for National Security."⁸⁷ In 1964, NSC-68 largely shaped U.S. foreign policy within the Johnson administration and provided the direction for the

⁸⁶Sorley, *A Better War, the Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*, 6-7.

⁸⁷Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, "NSC-68, 1950," 1964-1968, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/NSC68>, (accessed on 9 January 2014).

strategic aims and goals in Vietnam. In 1969, NSC-68 was still the foundations for President Nixon's policy towards communism. In addition to NSC-68, the Nixon Doctrine arguing for the pursuit of peace through partnership formed the overall strategy in which the aims in Vietnam were grounded.

What were the United States national strategic objectives? In 1964, shaped by NSC-68, President Johnson established overarching strategic objectives of bringing peace to South East Asia and containment of communist expansion. Within President Johnson's overall strategy, four salient objectives were established incorporating all element of national power. President Johnson's flexible response approach allowed for handling national crises with a diverse set of tools. In 1969, President Nixon detailed a five-point strategic plan that included Vietnamization, pacification, diplomatic isolation, peace negotiations, and the gradual withdrawal of United States military forces. President Nixon's strategic plan was rooted in NSC-68 and the Nixon Doctrine. The primary United States national strategic objectives President Nixon laid out provided the United States military a foundation for which to build an operational approach.

What were the overall military strategy objectives for Vietnam and what operational approach did the United States military take to achieve these objectives? In 1965, the Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum 652-65 established three key tasks for military operations in Vietnam. However, General Westmoreland instituted a three phase, two approach plan focusing on clearing insurgent forces from urban areas and destroying the exposed enemy with a series of conventional military operations which were not linked or nested with the strategic objectives. In 1969, the key military objectives were nested with President Nixon's Vietnamization strategy and were clearly understood by General Creighton Abrams. In support of the United States strategy, General Abrams developed his One War concept as the operational approach in 1969. The One War approach encompassed the use of conventional operations focused on the interdiction of enemy logistics lines of communication and counterinsurgency efforts in the form of pacification. Thus,

with a clearly articulated strategic end state, General Abrams was able to understand, visualize, and direct an operational approach that could achieve the overall goal.

What are the war termination criteria? The Johnson administration recognized the need to plan for war termination and specifically states “the overall strategic concept for Vietnam, as set forth, provides the basis for terminating the war in Vietnam under conditions which are satisfactory to the United States and the government of South Vietnam.”⁸⁸ President Johnson clearly defined strategic war objectives, but did not establish war termination criteria for the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War. Additionally, the operational objectives and approach described by General Westmoreland did not link tactical actions in Vietnam with the strategic policies of the United States. In 1969, the Nixon administration established a negotiated peace proposal to terminate the war. The United States proposed a cease-fire, complete withdrawal of all forces, and offered support to free elections under international supervision. Thus, with President Nixon’s defined strategic war objectives and established war termination criteria, General Abrams was able to provide an operational approach clear linking tactical actions and strategic policy.

What did the United States Military doctrine state at the time reference war termination? United States Military doctrine did not address war termination before the Vietnam War. United States Army Field Manuals 100-5, Field Service Regulations, *Operations*, dated 7 February 1964 and Field Manual 100-15, Field Service Regulations, *Larger Units*, dated 12 December 1963 discussed campaign planning but not war termination. However, a lack of codified doctrine did not signify that war termination criteria was not understood or present at the time. Additionally, the importance of a process establishing conditions in which war can be terminated and enables

⁸⁸Department of State, “Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara” 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam* 1964, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 9 January 2014).

the development of military operational end state and objectives are evident within official document in 1965.⁸⁹ With a common understanding of war termination framework, operational planners have a cogent process to develop operational objectives in order to achieve strategic aims. Thus, there should be direct linkage between operational objective and policy.

	President Johnson in Vietnam	President Nixon in Vietnam
What was the United States overall strategy towards communism?	Containment; NSC-68	Containment; NSC-68; Nixon Doctrine
What were the United States national strategic objectives?	Four salient strategic objectives established	Detailed a five-point strategic plan established
What was the overall military strategy, and what operational approach did the United States military take to achieve these objectives?	Attritional strategy; clear and destroy	One War approach; counterinsurgency, pacification
What are the war termination criteria?	No clear conditions established for termination of the war	Nixon's three-point negotiated peace proposal to terminate the war
What did the United States military doctrine state at the time reference war termination?	Not in doctrine; common understanding of war termination framework present	Not in doctrine; common understanding of war termination framework present

Table 1. Summary of the findings.

Source: Created by author.

Findings

Hypothesis one states that if the United States strategic policy on communism was clear, then there would be a precise nesting between the overall national strategy and the strategic aims and goal for Vietnam. The evidence from the case studies suggests the hypothesis under review is supported. In 1964, President Johnson's overarching strategic aim of bringing peace to South East Asia and containment of communist expansion was shaped by NSC-68 and provided the direction for the four key strategic aims and goals in Vietnam. In 1969, President Nixon's policy towards

⁸⁹Department of State, "Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara" 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam 1964*, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 09 January 2014).

communism was clear, it was grounded with the NSC-68 and the Nixon Doctrine. The pursuit of peace through partnership formed the overall strategy in which the aims in Vietnam were nested.

Hypothesis two contends that if the United States national strategic objectives were clear, then there would be a precise link between operational objectives and policy. The evidence from the case studies suggests the hypothesis under review has a mixed outcome. In 1964, President Johnson's strategic objectives for Vietnam were clear. However, General Westmoreland's objectives for Vietnam and approach he developed were not nested with the strategic aims. In 1969, President Nixon clearly defined the strategic objectives for the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. Thus, General Abrams was able to create an operational approach where the operational objectives linked to the overall strategic goals.

Hypothesis three asserts that if the Joint Force Commander understands war termination criteria, then the command will have the ability to adjust its operational approach, linking tactical actions with strategic aims. The evidence from the case studies suggests the hypothesis under review has a mixed outcome. President Johnson did not provide clear war termination criteria to the Joint Force Commander. Thus, General Westmoreland's approach did not provided a clear link between tactical actions and strategic policy. In 1969, General Abrams understanding of the war termination criteria, established by the Nixon administration, enabled him to develop an operational approach clear linking tactical actions and strategic policy.

Hypothesis four states that if war termination criteria is defined, then there will be a clear link between policy and operational objectives. The evidence from the case studies suggests the hypothesis under review has a mixed outcome. In 1964, President Johnson clearly defined strategic war objectives, but did not establish war termination criteria for the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. In 1969, the Nixon administration established a negotiated peace proposal to terminate the war. With President Nixon's defined strategic war objectives and

established war termination criteria, General Abrams was able to provide an approach clear linking operational objectives and strategic policy.

Hypothesis five states that if the United States military doctrine reference war termination is clear, then operational planners will have a cogent process to develop operational objectives. The evidence from the case studies suggests the hypothesis under review is not supported. United States Military doctrine did not address war termination before the Vietnam War. However, a lack of codified doctrine did not indicate that war termination criteria was not understood or present at the time. In 1965, a memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara establishes the importance of war termination and the development of military operational end state and objectives.⁹⁰ Although not codified in doctrine, the PROVN report provided the United States military and General Abrams and his staff a common understanding of war termination and a cogent process to develop operational objectives in order to achieve strategic aims.

The evidence of both case studies suggests that the United States' overarching strategic foreign policy on communism was clear. The overall national strategy and the strategic aims for Vietnam were nested and consistent with the United States overall strategic foreign policy. The evidence suggests that General Westmoreland and General Abrams understood the President's strategic aims for Vietnam. However, only General Abrams developed approaches that precisely linked operational objectives with policy. The evidence suggests that war termination criteria were provided to General Abrams. This understanding supported the development of operational objectives in order to achieve strategic aims, providing a link between policy and operational objectives. The evidence suggests that war termination criteria was not provided to General

⁹⁰Department of State, "Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara" 27 August 1965, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1964-1968: *Vietnam* 1964, 3, 356-363, <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v03/d130>, (accessed 9 January 2014).

Westmoreland, aiding in the disconnection between the operational objectives and the strategic policy.

	President Johnson in Vietnam	President Nixon in Vietnam	Hypotheses outcome
When the United States strategic policy on communism are clear, then there would be a precise nesting between the overall national strategy and the strategic aims and goal for Vietnam.	Supported	Supported	Supported
When the United States national strategic objectives were clear, then there would be a precise link between operational objectives and policy.	Not Supported	Supported	Mixed Outcome
When the Joint Force Commander understands the war termination criteria, then the command will have the ability to adjust the operational approach, linking tactical actions with strategic aims.	Not Supported	Supported	Mixed Outcome
When war termination criteria is defined, then there will be a clear link between policy and operational objectives.	Not Supported	Supported	Mixed Outcome
When the United States military doctrine reference war termination is codified, then the US operational planner will have a cogent process to develop operational objectives.	Not Supported	Not Supported	Not Supported

Table 2. Summary of the hypothesis.

Source: Created by author.

This section conducted a cross case analysis of the two case studies examined in previous sections. After a review and comparison of the findings from each case, this section examined if the finding were supported compared to the theory postulated. Based on the results and findings, the next section will summarize the overall monograph.

SUMMARY OF STUDY

This monograph explored two historical case studies from the Vietnam War to analyze the influence of termination criteria on the planning process and the relationship between strategic aims and operational objectives. Using key points of the Vietnam War, this monograph examined war termination criteria in order to formulating proposed improvement to operational

planning guidance. Through a qualitative analysis approach, this study uses structured, focused comparison method to examine two separate time periods of the Vietnam War. Therefore, the primary goal of this study was to identify the linkage between clearly defined war termination criteria and the operational planners ability to apply operational art to develop a plan to meet strategic objectives. The overall hypothesis tested is that if the United States clearly identifies the national strategic objectives and termination criteria, then operational planners could develop and adjust an operational approach to link the operational objectives and policy. The evidence suggests that the overall thesis for this monograph has a mixed outcome. Thus, when war termination criteria are clearly defined then operational planners can apply operational art to develop plans to meet strategic objectives, is correct and supported by the analysis of the evidence in one of the case studies.

The importance of this study is to yield and codify salient points from an analysis of an historical case study in regards to war termination and withdrawal from conflict. Examining the Vietnam War termination from policy to operational objectives, one may discover generalizable knowledge to fill the current gap for operational planners. Within the United States, this study is of importance to policy makers, commanders, and operational planners. The operational planner must translate guidance into an operational approach that links tactical actions in time, space, and purpose in order to achieve strategic objectives. The commander, with staff assistance, must be able to understand and visualize the current and future state, in order to describe and direct the approved operational approach. Policy makers and their staffs must work to link national policy with strategic objectives to enable operational success. Vital to the accomplishment of the fore mentioned is an open dialogue built upon a relationship and rooted in trust.

To fill the current void, this monograph recommends that the current methodologies of teaching war termination concepts within Joint Professional Military Education and individual service Professional Military Education be reviewed. This review would enable additional

courseware to be put into place to enable better understanding of termination criteria and help improve planners and commanders understanding of termination criteria and its importance. This improvement would embolden planners at the strategic and operation level to ask the right questions, to help strengthen the link between the operational objectives and the strategic policies.

This study attempted to clarify the importance of clear and succinct termination criteria prior to employment of military force, given the dynamic and complex strategic context additional studies and research are recommended. First, the political, domestic, and international context differences between 1964 and 1968 could account for the disparity in establishing operational objectives to link the tactical actions to the strategic aims. Therefore, attempting to isolate quantitative variables should be studied to yield comparative results. Next, the personal and relationship differences between President Johnson, Secretary of Defense McNamara, and General Westmorland compared to those of President Nixon, Secretary of Defense Laird and General Abrams may account for the diverse application of operational art. Thus, a cogent look at the effects of personalities and individual agencies could yield vital generalizable information.

History does not repeat itself and causation is difficult to identify. The inability of the military to link tactical means to strategic ends finally resulted in a humiliating loss for the United States military and American prestige worldwide. Although the United States never lost a tactical battle, in the end, they did not win the war. At the core of the problem, the United States failed to understand the theoretical concepts of war and politics, and failed to clearly define or develop an operational end state that supported the strategic aim. Generalizable trends do exist and clear national strategic objectives are not only necessary, but they must be sufficient prior to employment of military force. For commanders and planners, understanding strategic objectives and ability to visualize an end state is vital. Additionally, the ability to describe an operational approach in support of strategic aims will enable linkage between strategic goals and tactical actions, supporting accomplishment of national strategic policy.

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